

This Time, For Sure

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Hiccup

Status: Completed

Published: 2013-01-29 08:51:31

Updated: 2013-01-29 08:51:31

Packaged: 2016-04-26 13:27:30

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 7,338

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Cowardly, little Hiccup. Useless, blundering Hiccup. The biggest screw-up Berk had ever seen. She'd catch him in the act of "whatever he was up to. This time, for sure. Rated for some strong language.

This Time, For Sure

Yes, I am aware that this has already been done a million times. And the truth is, I don't care. I had the shittiest day yesterday, and after receiving some horrible news, decided it was time to sit down with my closest sorority sisters and watch **_How to Train Your Dragon**_**. Easily the best decision ever. And when I got to this scene, I just started writing. And I did not stop. Because I felt it had to be done. See, the thing literature accomplishes that film really does not is giving you complete insight to the actual thoughts of the characters. Film only does that some of the time. Thus, it had to be done. But not for the sake of literature and all that. Mostly just for me. Because I write for myself, damn it. And you readers are just the unfortunate recipients of my emotional and moderately inspired tirades. **

I do not own **_How to Train Your Dragon.**_** Movie or books.**

Astrid picked up a rock and sat on the boulder. He had come from this way the day before. Whether he had been spending his time in the cove or had just been passing though, she was not sure, but she was certain of the fact that he would come through again. And she knew it would be that day, if she could assume as much based on his facial expression and how quickly he had slipped away from the crowd.

This time, for sure.

She'd catch him in the act of "whatever he was up to.

Cowardly, little Hiccup. Useless, blundering Hiccup. The biggest

screw-up Berk had ever seen. And he had showed her up.

She hefted her axe in her hand and fought the urge to throw it at a nearby tree. She might need it when he showed up.

He had taken her dragon. It was hers by right. Everyone had known it from the first day of training. She was supposed to kill the Monstrous Nightmare. She had worked years for that honour. Then he had showed up in the ring. He had ruined equipment, destroyed courses, disgraced what it meant to be a viking. And then suddenly he could almost _control_ those monsters, making them fall at his feet with barely a touch, backing them away with only his words. No fighting, no skill.

Half the time he looked frightened, unsure, yet he had continued to do things his way. It was almost brave, she conceded, but only almost. After whatever he had done had worked, he would get this confidence that was just not _Hiccup_. She had no idea where that came from; she had no idea he was even capable of such confidence. It annoyed her.

"...leaving," his nasal voice said from behind the rock entrance. He had a tendency to run his words together, almost mumbling. "We're leaving." He stepped into view, hefting a huge basket on his shoulder. "Time to pack up."

Leaving? He was leaving after his victory? Who did he think he was? She wondered for a moment who he was talking to, but then decided that he was simply insane. Or perhaps...She could not see the person. Maybe someone had been teaching him...

"Looks like you and me are taking a little vacation." He looked around the cove, his back to her. "Forever."

He definitely had to have a teacher. If he had not even noticed her obvious presence, there was no way he had been developing his ring strategy on his own.

He sighed heavily and set his basket down. "Oh, man..."

She was tired of being ignored. Gleaning information would be easier if she were to question him directly. She tightened her grip on the rock and swiped it against the edge of her battle axe, the metal and stone making a very satisfying _shink!_

Hiccup's head snapped up and he stumbled back. "Aggh! What theâ€" He tripped over a rock, quickly straightened up, smoothed down his clothes, and tried to act as casual as possible. "What are you doing here?"

Astrid pretended to inspect her axe with mild interest. "I wanna know what's going on," she said. She dropped the rock and jumped off the boulder as she casually tossed the axe to her other hand. She walked toward him and he stepped back, his eyes darting around. Who the hell was he looking for? He refused to meet her eyes, so she pointed her axe at him, demanding his attention. "No one just gets as good as you do." He held up his hands as he walked backwards, keeping his eyes on the axe. She ground her teeth and continued forward, determined to squash the unwelcome thought of how adorable he looked. Like a skittish little bird. "_Especially_ you."

He brought his fists close together as if to protect himself.

"Start talking," she demanded.

"Ah...eh...ah..." He looked to his left as he continued to back away from her.

She passed her axe to her left hand and threw her arms out. "Are you _training_ with someone?"

"I...I...juh...I...training?" He shook his head. "I'm...eh..."

She then noticed the odd vest he was wearing. He normally wore a fur vest. She grabbed him by the leather shoulder and pulled him up, surprised at how heavy he was. "It better not involve _this_." Years in the forge must have put some muscle on him. He was not a complete twig.

"I..."

She dropped him and looked at her hand as she walked around him. What the hel was he wearing?

"I know this looks really bad," he started. "You see, this is...uh..."

She rolled her eyes and grabbed him by the back of his vest. Suddenly she heard a loud rustle from a cluster of trees he had been eyeing earlier. She gasped and almost threw him down.

"Whoa-OH!" he shouted as he hit the ground with a hard thud.

Astrid looked into the trees. She switched the axe back to her right hand, her dominant hand, and stepped forward, not even noticing when she stepped on Hiccup or the groan he let out when her heel ground into his back.

"You're right! You're right!" he called behind her. He chuckled slightly. "Yeah..uh...I'm through with the lies." He ran up beside her.

She kept walking toward the trees. It had to have been a rather large human to make that loud of a noise, but Berk was in no short supply of large humans.

"I've been making..." He looked toward the trees and back at her, that stupid, crooked grin plastered across his face. "Outfits!" he declared. "So, you got me. It's time everyone knew." He stepped in front of her and grabbed her shoulder and one of her hands and pressed it against his chest, bidding her to grab his shirt. "Drag me back. Go ahead. Here we go..."

He was hiding something in those trees, and she would not be distracted by his antics. She switched his grip on her hand so she was holding his, then twisted his fingers back, forcing him to the ground.

"Ow! Why would you _do_ that?"

She kicked him in the stomach so he was lying on his back on the grassy floor. "That's for the lies," she stated. "And _that's_," she said, punctuating her words by dropping the hilt of her axe against his chest and letting it bounce into her hands, "for everything else."

Then, something in the group of trees growled and she looked up, her senses heightened again. Some sort of wild animal?

"Oh...man..." he groaned as he stood up.

Something black with bright green eyes slithered out of the trees. It raised its head.

Astrid gasped and turned around. _Night Fury_. They were both going to die. "Get down!" she shouted as she grabbed Hiccup around his middle and threw both of them to the ground. He let out a sharp _oof_, and for a moment she felt bad. She had done nothing but abuse him for the entire conversation, but it was better he was hurt on the floor than dead.

The black dragon growled and leapt towards them and all she could think about was that her childhood friend, the kid she had played with before skill set and expectation had pushed them apart, was in danger. Hiccup could not fight. She could fight. Hiccup could not defend himself. She could defend them both, or at least give him enough time to get away. She rolled off of him and scrambled to her feet, grabbing her axe with both hands and preparing to strike as the dragon lunged. "Run! Run!"

"NO!"

And then, for whatever reason, the idiot was in front of her, jumping on her before the dragon could, grabbing her axe and pulling them both back down. In her surprise she lost her grip on the hilt and he flung it out of her reach.

Hiccup jumped to his feet and stood between her and the dragon, who was on its hind legs, ready to attack. "No! It's Ok!" He looked down at Astrid. "It's Ok," he repeated holding up his hand and motioning for her to stay down. He then turned his full body to the dragon, made a placating motion and said calmly and slowly, "She's a friend."

Astrid pushed herself onto her hands and knees, before slowly standing. A friend. He had told the dragon she was a friend. He had told the _dragon_ that she was a friend.

The dragon growled at her and let its front legs fall to the ground. It took a step toward her and Hiccup held its head, trying to keep it back. "You just scared him."

Astrid gaped. "I scared _him_?"

The dragon growled at her again and she flinched.

Wait..."Who is '_him_'?"

"Uh..." Hiccup released his hold on the dragon's head and smiled that stupid, crooked grin. She wanted to slap it off his face. "Astrid,"

he began. "Toothless." He gestured to the dragon. He then looked at that dragon with uncertainty and spoke slowly. "Toothless, Astrid," he said, gesturing to her.

The dragon growled and Hiccup winced and looked to her for some sort of reaction.

Astrid did not know how to respond. She had no idea what to think. She just shook her head incredulously. He had named a dragon Toothless. He had named a _dragon_ Toothless. He had _named _a dragon Toothless.

Hiccup was hiding a Night Fury. And the Night Fury listened to Hiccup. Screw-up, skittish, bumbling, useless Hiccup had somehow downed and made peace with a godsdamned _Night_ _Fury_.

She took a step back as his words from weeks earlier hit her with full force. _"Ok, but I hit a Night Fury."_

He had been telling the truth.

And with that realization, her mind imploded. All she could do was turn and run.

Behind her, she heard Hiccup's sing-song, "Da-da-da. We're dead." Before he shouted sarcastically, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa! Where do you think you're going?"

Was he talking to her? She did not care. She would not stop running.

She had to tell someone. Not out of spite. She was not that low. Not because she was jealous. This was about more than her personal grudges against Hiccup because he had managed to show her up. This was about the safety of the people. The idiot was keeping the most deadly dragon within walking distance of the village! Did he not realize that lives were in danger? Parents, children, his friends...Had he not considered the consequences of keeping and protecting the very product of lighting and death?

She charged up the hill, looking behind her to see if they were following just before she leapt onto a fallen log. As she jumped off the log, something grabbed her right arm in a vice-like grip and carried her off the ground. She screamed, swinging her legs as the beast carried her higher. She wrapped her other arm around the leg that had grabbed her and was not surprised at all to find that it was scaly; though, admittedly, nothing would faze her now that she was flying over treetops, probably to be dropped to her doom at any moment.

"Oh, Great Odin's Ghost," she gasped as she clutched the dragon's leg. For a few seconds, she contemplated the absolute irony of holding tight to a _dragon_, but at that moment, "Toothless" was the only thing keeping her from falling to her death. And damn it, she was going to cling to that with her life. "Oh, this is it..." She felt herself slipping and clung tighter, all the while screaming, "NOOOOOOOOOO!"

The dragon circled toward a particularly tall tree and almost flung her onto one of the higher branches. She clung to the branch with all

her might and tried to pull herself up to possibly sit on it for better balance, but the Night Fury landed on the top of the tree and the spry wood bent over. She slipped and was left dangling by her hands as the trunk of the tree bounced. She looked up.

What was that weird leather thing the dragon was wearing? Was that Hiccup on top of the dragon? Was that a saddle? Had he made a damn saddle for the damn dragon? "Hiccup!" she shrieked. She tried to pull herself up again to no avail. "Get me down from here!"

He leaned over and held out his hands. "You have to give me a chance to explain!"

The worthless kid had saddled a Night Fury. He had downed, made peace with, tamed and saddled a Night Fury. That was how he knew everything. It was remarkable, she had to admit, and for a moment, she felt more curious than angry. But her life was completely in his hands, and that fact pissed her off more than anything. As she shuffled her hands along the branch to get to the trunk, she shouted, "I am not listening to anything you have to say!"

"Then I won't speak," he replied in a weak attempt to appease her. He continued slowly, "Just let me show you."

It dawned on her that he meant for her to get on that dragon with him. She looked down and realized that while maybe he could sit there all day, she could not hang on much longer. Sure, if she were to slip he would not let her die. Hiccup was many things: stupid, useless, blundering, little... But heartless was not one of them. Still, even if she fell, he would somehow get her on that dragon. Even without realizing, he was offering her a classic choice: the easy way, or the hard way. And as much as she wanted to be angry with him for having complete control over the situation, she really felt she should choose the easy way.

"Please, Astrid," he said quietly, holding out a hand to her.

Using all of her strength, she pulled herself up until she was leaning over the branch and could bring her legs up without too much effort. Still keeping one hand on the tree for balance, she reached toward the dragon. The beast growled at her, and she decided to grab the saddle instead. She then straightened up, placed one foot into the crux where branch met trunk with her toes just on the dragon's leg, and pulled herself closer to the reptile. Hiccup's hand was still out, offering her assistance, but she was determined to be angry and slapped his hand away. He looked a bit hurt, and a part of her felt guilty. But she was doing what he asked, and he really had no explicit right to be affronted. She was the one being kidnapped. She gripped the saddle with both hands and pulled herself up, swinging her right leg across so that she was almost pressed up against Hiccup's back. Only almost. She was not going to hold onto Hiccup, not when she was perfectly capable of keeping a grip on the saddle. "Now, get me down," she demanded.

Hiccup leaned forward. "Toothless, down." He patted the dragon's head. "Gently."

The dragon unfurled his wings and slowly rose from the bent trunk.

"See?" Hiccup asked as he turned slightly to face Astrid. "Nothing to be afraid of!" "WHAH!"

Toothless the dragon suddenly shot into the air at an alarming speed.

Astrid screamed as she lost her grip on the beast. She was falling. She was going to die.

Hiccup leaned forward and shouted, "Toothless! What is wrong with you?"

Her legs flailed as she slid back and she barely caught onto Hiccup's sides with her ankles. Using what little strength she had left, she used her abs to sit up and grab onto the nearest thing she could, which just so happened to be Hiccup's face.

"Bad dragon!" Hiccup laughed nervously as Toothless leveled out.

She kept her legs around Hiccup and decided that she might as well wrap her arms around his torso, as well. Just for stability, of course. She was only setting aside her rage for the moment, and only because she was riding on top of a dragon and really needed to hold tight to something.

"He's not usually like this..."

Toothless then started leaning to the right. Too far to the right. Astrid looked down and saw that they were above water. If she were to fall, at least her chances of survival were higher, if not particularly good.

"Oh, no," Hiccup said in an annoyingly calm tone.

Toothless flipped upside down and they fell toward the ocean. Astrid screamed again. Just before they hit the water, Toothless flipped back around and dove under the waves and almost immediately popped back up. Still, they were submerged long enough for her to swallow an absurd amount of water and she took a few moments to cough and regain her breath. Unfortunately, Toothless dove again, and then psyched her out by not diving, but just barely hitting the surface of the water.

"Toothless, what are you doing?" Hiccup cried. "We need her to like us!"

As soon as she had regained control of her spasming lungs, Toothless flew straight up into the sky and started spinning.

"And now he's spinning," Hiccup said a bit unnecessarily as Astrid screamed again. He continued sarcastically, "Thank you for nothing, you useless reptile."

Toothless dove toward the ocean, still spinning and Astrid wrapped her arms tight around Hiccup and closed her eyes. Being angry at him was not even worth the trouble anymore.

"Ok! I am sorry!" she cried. "I'm sorry! Just get me off of this thing!" she pleaded.

And just before they hit the water again, Toothless came to a sudden stop.

She cried out and held her breath, but everything seemed to have stopped moving, save for the wind blowing around her. After a moment she felt a strange sensation like she was being lifted up, and she knew the dragon was rising higher, but it was gentle this time. Something cool and wet, like a mist, brushed her cheeks.

Tentatively, she opened her eyes, and when she was able to see somewhat clearly, her eyelids flew open. All she could see for miles were fluffy shades of rose and orange, matching the colours of the sunset. She was in the clouds. She reached out her right hand, afraid of losing her grip, but when she did not feel herself slipping she reached further. Cool droplets like little sprays of ice blew past her fingertips. She grinned manically as she realized that she was touching clouds. Years of gazing at and wondering about them—were they fluffy and warm and soft like wool? Clouds were not at all what she had expected, and it was amazing. Hiccup did not seem to be reacting. But, then again, he had clearly flown on Toothless before. The clouds were probably less exciting to him, since he had probably been among them so much. For her, however, it was the most incredible experience of her life. She reached up with her other arm and leaned back, closing her eyes in delight as her hands ran through the marvel that was the clouds.

Toothless turned slightly and she lowered her arms and wrapped them around Hiccup's torso again, only then noticing how his legs would change every now and then. She looked down at his left foot and noticed a cord that ran down the dragon's tail. She followed the cord and gasped when she noticed that the cord attached to a canvas fin that was an exact replica of Toothless' natural fin. It dawned on her that perhaps that time when she had almost caught him, that time when he was carrying that huge bundle...Maybe it had been a tail fin.

She felt Hiccup's leg adjust and saw the cord move slightly. The mechanical fin changed position, and Toothless' fin changed to match it. They were almost in perfect sync, boy and dragon.

She looked forward at Hiccup with a newfound respect. Since childhood he had been dreaming, creating, and building. She realized that maybe Hiccup was not that much of a screw-up. He probably was one of the smartest people she knew. He most likely was the smartest. Every single mistake he had made had led him to this, a way to fly, commanding the movements of a dragon with his feet.

The sun slowly disappeared over the horizon and Toothless moved upward and back, flipping slowly and gently.

She held tighter to Hiccup, though not out of fear. The idea of turning and gliding miles above the surface of the earth was exhilarating.

Toothless finished his flip and flew straight up through a higher layer of cloud, and suddenly they were in darkness, the clumps of icy moisture blocking out any remaining light. Stars shown all around in millions. A stream of colour and light appeared and danced past the flyers.

The Northern Lights.

How long had she seen those lights? On clear nights, she and her family would gaze at the sky. Her father would explain that fire covered and flowed above all the waters of the earth, and since Berk was so far north, the fires streamed and collected around the outer ocean, and that's why the flames were visible. And there she was, inside the lights. They moved and danced and changed colour around her.

Toothless leveled out and flew straight toward the edge of the clouds, and once they had emerged over the cliff of white and blue shadows, she could see little lights glowing below them. It was her home. Her tiny village, twinkling with the glow of family fires, looking warm and inviting and positively beautiful.

She gasped and grinned widely as she took in the sight. She was the only person, besides Hiccup, who had ever seen Berk from this perspective. It was incredible.

Toothless turned his head slightly and the corner of his mouth turned up. She could swear that the dragon was smiling at her, possibly laughing at her, as if to say, "I told you so." Which, of course, he had not. Hiccup had.

She leaned into Hiccup's back, hugged him tight, and let her head rest on his shoulder. As she rode on the dragon, her chest pressed against the back of her childhood friend, she thought that perhaps everything she had once known was wrong. The Night Fury, a creature she had been taught to fear above all other beasts, was gentle and had a personality and a heart. Hiccup, a boy she had regarded for five years as useless and unreliable and disastrous, had tamed and trained a Night Fury. He was brave and brilliant...

Toothless dove down toward the island and wove between the village watch towers. No one noticed as the two teenagers flew by. She wondered how many times Hiccup had flown Toothless so close to the village. Brave, brilliant, bold Hiccup, taunting the vikings with a forbidden friendship.

Toothless flapped his wings and they rose higher, climbing the slope of a mountain. As she sat there with her arms around Hiccup, the world zooming beneath her, and the wind in her face, she hoped the night would last forever, that their flight would never end.

Hiccup had said that he had wanted to show her, and show her he had. In one short ride, he had opened her eyes to things she never even thought possible. Letting him know how she felt suddenly seemed extremely important.

"Alright, I admit it." She chuckled slightly. "This is pretty cool." Those words did not even begin to cover her feelings so she corrected herself. "It's amazing." She looked at Hiccup. "He's amazing." And by "he" she had meant Hiccup, but she felt oddly shy about letting him know that. For some reason, he intimidated her. He was so much smarter than she was, and so much more brave, in ways she could never match. So instead of clarifying, she bent over and patted Toothless gently.

She had earlier compared Hiccup to a skittish bird. And while she

would still call him a bird, she was not sure skittish was right. He seemed so peaceful as he flew on Toothless. So calm, so confident. He may not have been the strongest on the land, but with his Night Fury, he was the strongest in the skies. The sky was his world.

Hiccup was so much more than she had ever given him credit for. More than anyone had given him credit for. He had done the impossible. Not only that, he had helped his wounded enemy and given that enemy the means to fly. He had turned an enemy into a friend. Yes, he was brave and brilliant and bold. He was also kind and merciful and willing to take chances. He was attentive and strong and confident, in ways no one had ever known. Perhaps the village did not realize it yet, but she did. And she would help him. She would make them see. Because it was important that everyone know. "So what now?" she murmured. The people had to see this, realize who Hiccup was, realize what dragons were. They had to realize that maybe Hiccup's way was not wrong all the time. It was just...different. He would actually make a fabulous chief one day, and whoever he ended up with would be a lucky girl, indeed. For a few seconds, she let herself wonder what life would be like if she were that girl. He had shown her amazing things, and she could help him show the rest of the world. She shook her head. Why was she letting herself think that? Of course, she would help him, but only because he was her childhood friend, and perhaps they could be close friends again.

He would be a wonderful chief, and the people would come to accept that. Maybe at first, things would be difficult. If he could prove that he measured up to their standards, first, maybe then they could show the people...

The people's standards.

"Hiccup!" she exclaimed. "Your final exam is tomorrow!" How had she forgotten? How had she completely forgotten what he would have to do? How would it tear him apart? How would it affect his relationship with Toothless? "You know you're gonna have to kill" She looked down at Toothless and lowered her voice to a whisper. "Kill a dragon."

Hiccup let out a groan of dread and frustration. "Don't remind me."

Suddenly, Toothless dove to the side and both kids let out a whelp of surprise.

"Toothless, what's happening?" Hiccup asked.

The dragon continued to fly, jerking from side to side, into a thick fog.

"Whoa! What is it?"

Out of the fog, a Monstrous Nightmare carrying a dolphin swooped in and Toothless barely dodged the huge, flapping wings.

"Get down!" Hiccup hissed. He crouched low on Toothless and she followed suit.

Then from the other side, a Deadly Nadder appeared carrying something large in its talons.

Astrid bit her lip and looked forward, but bit by bit the fog cleared and she could see that they were surrounded by dragons. Hundreds of dragons, all carrying some sort of livestock or fish. "What's going on?" she asked quietly, a slight tremor in her voice.

"I don't know," Hiccup replied. "Toothless!" He put a hand on the dragon's head. "You gotta get us out of here, Bud." Toothless shook his head and Hiccup pulled his hand back. He looked to the side as a Monstrous Nightmare with a cow flapped by. "It looks like they're hauling in their kill..."

Astrid felt her lungs constrict. "Uh...What does that make us?" How on earth could he have trusted a Night Fury? How stupid was he? And how stupid was she? She gulped when the two heads of a Hideous Zippleback noticed the two humans.

All at once, the dragons dove downward and started weaving through huge stone pillars. She could not help the little shout that escaped her mouth. She clung tightly to Hiccup as Toothless flew between rock formations. She felt slightly safer. She looked forward as they approached a huge volcano and gulped. It made sense. The fog was none other than Helheim's Gate, and they were headed straight for the nest.

The dragons dove through a small hole in the wall of the volcano, and she and Hiccup both shouted as Toothless picked up speed, dashing through a dark tunnel and nearing a strange, red light ahead. Toothless rounded a corner and she saw a huge cavern with no visible bottom due to a red fog, the apparent source of the light. Astrid buried her face in Hiccup's shoulder but kept her eyes open, looking around with morbid fascination.

"What my dad wouldn't give to find this," Hiccup murmured.

Toothless looked from side to side and eventually flew to the right, gliding around two huge stalactites before resting on a platform and hiding behind a huge stone column.

Dragons continued to pour into the cave and simply let their kill fall through the fog.

"Oh. Well, it's satisfying to know that all of our food has been dumped down a hole," Hiccup commented sardonically.

"They're not eating any of it," Astrid added.

Hiccup's head snapped up, and she followed the movement and saw a Gronckle clumsily flapping in. The dragon hovered over the fog for a moment, opened its mouth, and let a small fish fall into the fog. Then, it scratched its head and apparently satisfied started to fly away. Before it had moved even two feet, an enormous head emerged from the fog, opened its mouth, and clamped its huge jaws around the Gronckle before sliding back down into the fog.

Astrid felt Hiccup stiffen and heard him gasp, and she breathed, "What...is that?"

All of the dragons cowered into holes and ledges, keeping as far from the gigantic creature as possible.

The head emerged again and let out a growl.

Hiccup leaned over and said, "Ok, Bud. We gotta get out of here."

The beast's eyes stopped on them.

"Now!"

Toothless jumped up and raced toward the tunnel through which they had arrived, barely evading the gargantuan creature's jaws as it snapped at his tail. Every other dragon also took flight, fear driving them all with alarming speed toward the exit. The beast snapped again at Toothless, and Astrid was far too afraid to look back to see if it would try to follow them out.

Toothless dove into the tunnel and swerved along the curves eventually darting into the fog that was a pale blue in the moonlight.

Astrid let out a breath she had not realized she had been holding. "What was that thing?" she whispered into the night.

"I have no idea," Hiccup whispered back.

She tangled her fingers in the wool of his tunic, rested her cheek against his shoulder blade, closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. The whole affair seemed entirely too unbelievable. She opened her eyes again and tried to focus on what was real. Hiccup was real. Toothless was real. The fog was real. The swarm of dragons that was slowly dispersing was real. All of which meant that the thing in the cavern was real.

"I had no idea a dragon that big even existed," Hiccup murmured.

She started. "You think that thing was a dragon?"

They emerged from the mist and Toothless kept flying straight for Berk.

He shook his head. "I don't know what else it could be..."

Toothless flew around the island, once again weaving through the watchtowers as he sped toward the cove, but that time, the ride was not leisurely.

Astrid's head buzzed. A dragon...a dragon...a dragon that big...a dragon that every other dragon brought food to...Something clicked in her head.

Toothless glided over the forest and descended over the cove.

"Unless it's some creature sent by Hel herself..." Hiccup added.

Toothless touched down and skipped to a stop.

"No! No!" Astrid exclaimed. "It totally makes sense! It's like a

giant beehive! They're the workers, and that's their queen! It controls them!" Toothless had only just stopped, and she dismounted quickly. "Let's find your dad." She started running, expecting Hiccup to follow her.

"No! No!" Hiccup shouted.

She heard something like metal clinking and the sound of footfall and then he was in front of her, his arms outstretched and his hands flexed. She slowed to a stop.

"No," he repeated. "Not yet. They'll kill Toothless!" He let one of his hands drop. "No, Astrid, we have to think this through. Carefully." He turned to the dragon and started walking toward him.

She stared after him. "Hiccup, we just discovered the dragon's nest: the thing we've been after since vikings first sailed here! And you want to keep it a secret? What?" "To protect your pet dragon? Are you serious?" What was he thinking?

Hiccup stopped and turned to face her, his face more serious than she had ever seen it. His stance was strong, showing no uncertainty or fear. Then he said clearly, "Yes." Usually there was some nervousness about him, or a smirk playing at the corners of his mouth. At that moment, his mouth was set in a grim line, his brow slightly furrowed, his green eyes unwavering. Every feature of his face was strong determined.

Where had the usual Hiccup gone? Or, was this the real Hiccup, and she and everyone else had simply been too blind to see? Was he always a strong, young man and they had never given him the chance to actually be himself? Had they really failed to acknowledge him for all that he was? Of course he would want to save Toothless. The dragon was the first being who had treated him as if he were worth something. Toothless was the first to give Hiccup a chance to be...Hiccup.

And then a new thought occurred to her. On some level, conscious or not, it was about more than just his pet dragon. It was about sacrifice. Hiccup would not sacrifice if he could help it.

Once again she thought about what a wonderful chief he would make. Perhaps the best the village had ever seen. She would have complete faith in him.

Her heart pounded as she realized that she already had complete faith in him. He had not even come up with a plan and she would still go along with whatever he said, no matter how unconventional. Because he seemed to have ideas that were, while not always perfect, nice and heart-filled. And whatever he came up with, he would give it his all.

Hiccup was not her childhood friend. He had grown up.

Hiccup turned away from her and dropped his head, not out of nervousness. His expression was more...dejected, yet pensive.

She swallowed. She wanted to make up for years of all but ignoring him, for two weeks of fuming over him. She wanted to tell him that

she believed in him. She wanted to assure him that she would help him. So she said, "Ok. Then what do we do?"

He shrugged. "Just...give me until tomorrow."

He looked at her and then away again. She was shocked by how hopeless his voice sounded, like he had already given up.

"I'll figure something out."

She wished she had some way to reassure him, but all she could manage was another, "Ok." Then, in a half-assed effort to cheer him up, she punched him lightly in the arm. Or at least she had thought it was light. Hiccup was rubbing his arm and shaking his head at her incredulously. "That's for kidnapping me," she declared.

He turned to Toothless and pointed to her.

It was then that the moonlight fell perfectly on his face, showing off the freckles splayed across his cheeks. It was then that her heart seemed to slam against her ribcage as she was struck by what good-looking young man he was. It was then that she realized that he would be a very attractive grown man in a few years. It was then that she got the urge to do some thing crazy.

He looked back at her, still rubbing his arm, seeming to wait for another blow.

She pushed her bangs back. Did she dare? She met his eyes for a second and looked down. She decided to just go for it. Keeping one hand over her pounding heart, she grabbed the front of his shirt and pulled him close. Hiccup winced slightly, confirming her suspicions about his expectations, but she did not give herself time to care. She leaned to the side and pressed her lips against his left cheek and pulled back and let go of him quickly. She refused to look at him, suddenly and inexplicably afraid of what his face might look like. "That's for..." For what? Opening her world? Trusting her? Being wonderful? No words could fit whatever nameless thing she was feeling, and she decided to repeat her earlier words. "Everything else."

Then she turned and walked away. After a few steps, curiosity about his reaction almost got the better of her, and she turned slightly. Out of the corner of her eye she saw that Hiccup had not budged. Still terrified of his expression, she started jogging away, her pace turning into a full sprint as soon as she had left the cove.

What the hel had she been thinking?

When the lights of the village were in sight, she allowed herself to stop and lean back against the trunk of a birch. She pressed her hands against her chest as she fought for breath and tried to tell herself that her heart rate was only due to her short run.

What was wrong with her?

She tried to imagine how he might have reacted. Perhaps he would have reacted well. Perhaps he would not have thought her actions completely ridiculous and unwelcome. Or perhaps he would have pulled away from her. She was fool to think he had trusted her after she had

practically forced her way into the situation. He had not had much of a choice beyond revealing everything. And after she had been anything but civil to him for two weeks...

She groaned and let her head fall back. He would avoid her, of course. There was absolutely no way he would ever look at her, much less speak to her, again. Not after the way she had treated him for years and the past weeks. Not after sending such a confusing message. He would certainly want nothing to do with her.

Maybe she could convince him that she really did want to be friends. Maybe he would not avoid her. Hiccup was kind, after all. He would not just reject her.

Odin's beard! How much more could she obsess? It was almost as if...

She shook her head. The back of her neck and shoulders felt hot and tight. There was no way. How long had she been with him? An hour? Maybe even less? There was absolutely no possible way she had gone from being beyond annoyed with him to having a small crush on him in such a short time. It was impossible.

She had never had a crush herself, but she had seen older and younger girls go through it. Sure, the symptoms she was suffering were markedly similar, but everything was just caused by the incredible and confusing events of the night. Nothing more.

She did not have feelings for Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third.

She smiled and lightly brushed her fingertips over her lips, still tingling from the sensation of touching warm skin.

Things would be normal in the morning. She would talk to him as if nothing had happened. Everything would be fine. He would have a plan, and she would do whatever she could to help him.

Then he would help the people see.

They would help the people see.

She grinned against her fingers.

Things were about to change.

This time, for sure.

It was only after that thought had crossed her mind that she realized that she had left her axe in the cove.

****The Vikings actually did call the Northern Lights by that very name. Just...in their language. Norðrljós is the word, which I can't even pronounce in my head, let alone out loud, so I sure as hell was not going to make any of you do it. Fortunately that translates literally to "Northern Lights," so I kept it as that. Also, contrary to popular opinion, there is no actual mythology in Viking lore surrounding the presence of these lights. There are three possible origins that the Norse proposed: the first is used in the story, the second states that sunlight from the other side of the**

world escaped the edge of the world and shoots into the sky, the third suggests that frost and glaciers store energy and then release it back into the sky at night. Fun facts from the anthropology major.**

So, as I was writing this, I had an interesting revelation. Yes, everyone credits Hiccup with being intelligent. But I think that we don't give him enough credit. I mean, this kid built all sorts of machines and tools after only having the knowledge to build catapults and craft swords and axes. He shows an extremely solid understanding of engineering. And if we consider the fact that he built a tail fin, which clearly shows some comprehension of the laws of aerodynamics, we realize that Hiccup is beyond smart. People, Hiccup single-handedly discovered the laws of physics. He's a fucking genius.

Also, this is the longest one-shot I have ever written. And I am very exhausted now. Maybe I'll add more. Maybe I'll go ahead and tell the whole damn movie from Astrid's point of viewâ€"it's certainly an interesting one to work with. But I'm not promising anything. I have plenty to work on as it is.

Leave a review if it suits your fancy. I'm not big on demanding them. They're nice to have, but only if I don't beg or force them.

End
file.